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LEADER CHARACTERISTICS AND METHODS OF UPWARD INFLUENCE
IN ORGANIZATIONAL DECISION SITUATIONS

Richard T. Mowday

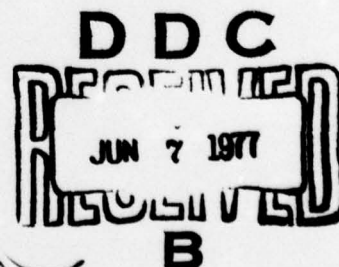University of Nebraska, Lincoln

Technical Report No. 12

March 1977

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Abstract

This study investigated relationships between characteristics
of individuals exerting upward influence in organizations and the methods
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principals indicated the likelihood of using five methods of influence
in three organizational decision situations. Methods of influence were
examined in relation to the principal's years of supervisory experience,
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discussed.

Leader Characteristics and Methods of Upward Influence

in Organizational Decision Situations

There is considerable evidence suggesting the importance of power
and influence as constructs contributing to an understanding of be-
havior in organizational settings (e.g., Patchen, 1974; Pfeffer &
Salancik, 1974; Strauss, 1962). It has become somewhat commonplace,
however, to note that power remains a relatively neglected topic of
organizational research (Kahn, 1964; Mowday, Note 1; Porter, Note 2).
Support for the contention that power is a under-researched topic is not
difficult to find. The central concerns of organizational researchers
over the years can be assessed by examining material included in major
volumes designed to summarize theory and research in this area. One
such volume is Dunnette's (1976) recently published Handbook of Industrial
and Organizational Psychology. As Porter (Note 2) has noted, the index
to the Handbook does not contain a single reference to power. Given
the otherwise complete nature of this volume, one is forced to conclude
that power has yet to occupy a central place in the study of organizations.

Following French and Raven (1959), much of the previous research on
power has focused on the bases and distribution of power in organizations
(Hickson, Hinings, Lee, Schneck & Pennings, 1971; Mechanic, 1963;
Pfeffer & Salancik, 1974). Although an understanding of who in
organizations possesses various types of power is important, of greater
concern to organizations may be the question of how individuals or
subunits use their power to influence the outcomes of important decisions.
In other words, how is a given base of power translated into effective
action in organizational decision making situations? Such a concern
focuses attention on the process through which power is exercised.

Further, it views the exercise of power as a purposive and instrumental act. In this regard, important questions are raised about the choices a powerholder must make concerning: (1) when to exercise power; (2) who to attempt to influence; and (3) what method of influence to use. The focus of this study was on several factors that may affect the choice among alternative methods of influence.

Theory and research concerning factors affecting the use of methods of influence is somewhat limited. In general, previous research on methods of influence has focused on two broad classes of factors: (1) situational factors surrounding the influence attempt; and (2) characteristics of the person exerting influence. A number of situational factors have been found to be related to the use of various methods. Relationships have been found between methods of influence and: (1) nature of the decision to be influenced (Goodstadt & Kipnis, 1970; Kipnis & Cosentino 1969); (2) goals or purpose of the influence attempt (Schmidt, Note 3; Wilkinson & Kipnis, Note 4); (3) number of employees supervised (Goodstadt & Kipnis, 1970; Kipnis & Cosentino, 1969); (4) person to be influenced (Mowday, Note.1; Schmidt, Note 3); and (5) timing of the influence attempt (Mowday, Note 1). Relatively less research has been conducted relating characteristics of the person exerting influence to the choice of a method. Methods of influence have been found to be related to: (1) self-confidence of the influence agent (Goodstadt & Kipnis, 1970; Kipnis & Lane, 1962); (2) internal/external control orientation (Goodstadt & Hjelle, 1973); and (3) years of supervisory experience (Kipnis & Cosentino, 1969).

The purpose of this study was to examine relationships between various methods of influence and characteristics of the person exerting influence.

In addition, predictions based on the influence behavior model of Te-deschi, Schlenker and Lindskold (1972) were tested. The likelihood of using five methods of influence in three organizational decision situations was examined in relation to: (1) years of supervisory experience; (2) self-confidence (i.e., perceived probability of successively exerting influence); (3) need for achievement; (4) need for power; and (5) ratings of actual power. Years of supervisory experience and self-confidence have previously been examined. Including these measures in the present study provided for a replication using a different sample and somewhat different methods. No studies were found reporting relationships between methods of influence and overall power and the needs for achievement and power.

The conceptual work of Tedeschi et al. (1972) provides a basis for making predictions concerning relationships between methods of influence and the measures of need strengths and actual power. A central variable in their Subjective Expected Utility (SEU) approach to influence behavior is the powerholder's self-confidence or perceived probability of successively exerting influence. The general level of self-confidence is thought to affect both the level of influence activity (i.e., propensity to exert influence) and the extent to which certain methods of influence are used. Tedeschi et al. (1972) suggest that the powerholder's level of self-confidence is influenced by actual power and the needs for achievement and power. The nature of these relationships, however, is not clearly specified. One way in which such factors may affect self-confidence is through the propensity to engage in influence activity. Previous research has shown that actual power and achievement and power needs are positively related to the individual's level of influence

activity(Tedeschi et al., 1972; Winter, 1973; Mowday, Note 1). Since
individuals with high power and achievement and power needs are more
likely to manifest higher levels of influence activity, they are also
more likely to have experienced successful influence attempts. Of
course, they may also have experienced some failures. Influence activity,
however, is a necessary condition for successful influence. Experienced
success in influence activity would serve to reinforce self-confidence
in future influence situations. Overall power and the needs for achieve-
ment and power may therefore indirectly affect the individual's self-
confidence by increasing the general level of influence activity and
thus the probability of experiencing successful influence.

Research by Kipnis and Lane (1962) and Goodstadt and Kipnis (1970)
indicates that self-confidence is directly related to the methods of
influence used in influence situations. Both found that individuals
low in self-confidence were less likely to use persuasive arguments as
a method and more likely to use methods with a low degree of personal
involvement (e.g., refer problem to someone else or rely upon rules and
regulations). In contrast, individuals with high self-confidence may
be more likely to use methods with a higher degree of personal involve-
ment such as persuasive arguments. In addition, they may believe that
more "extreme" and potentially costly methods (e.g., threats or coercion)
are unnecessary for success. Individuals with high self-confidence may
also be less likely to use indirect methods such as appeals to organiza-
tional rules and policies in attempting influence.

To summarize, it was predicted that measures of self-confidence would
be positively related to actual power and the needs for achievement and
power. These measures were also predicted to be positively related to

the use of persuasive arguments and negatively related to appeals to legitimate authority (i.e., organization rules and policies). Based on previous research, years of supervisory experience were predicted to have a positive relationship with appeals to legitimate authority. Individuals with high tenure are more likely to rely upon their "expertise" with respect to policies and procedures in exercising influence (Tedeschi et al., 1972).

Method

Sample and Research Sites

Subjects for this study were 65 elementary school principals in three West Coast school districts. Elementary school principals were chosen for study for several reasons: (1) the principals occupied intra-organizational boundary spanning roles and thus were in a position to exercise upward influence in the organization; and (2) limiting the sample to only elementary school principals allowed formal position power and role requirements to be held relatively constant. The three school districts studied were similar in size and organizational structure. No major differences were found between the samples in terms of the demographic characteristics of principals. For these reasons, the samples were combined for purposes for analysis.

Research Instruments

Self-Confidence/Perceived Probability of Successful Influence.

Principals were asked to indicate their influence-related perceptions with respect to three decision situations: (1) the allocation of budgetary resources to schools; (2) job reclassification of a subordinate in the absence of currently available budgetary resources; and (3) securing

resources to undertake a special project (resources in addition to the basic budget allocation). These decisions were chosen for study because they were thought to be common to the managerial role in most organizations. In addition, the determination of the decision outcome was outside the sphere of authority of the principal and thus the exercise of upward influence was necessary to affect the decision outcome.

Principals were asked to indicate their perceived probability of successfully influencing each of the decisions. Responses were made on a 11 point scale representing the number of chances out of 100 of being successful. The three measures were thought to reflect the construct of "self-confidence" discussed by Tedeschi et al. (1972) and Goodstadt and Kipnis (1970).

Methods of Influence. For each decision situation, respondents were asked to rate the likelihood of using five methods of influence in attempting to influence the decision. The five methods of influence were: (1) threats (e.g., to go to the school board); (2) legitimate authority (e.g., appeals to school district regulations or school board policy); (3) persuasive arguments; (4) rewards or exchange of favors; and (5) providing information to the decision maker in such a way they are not aware you are trying to influence them. Following Tedeschi et al. (1972), the last method of influence was interpreted as manipulation. Respondents indicated the likelihood of using each method in the three decision situations on a 5 point scale ranging from "very unlikely to use method" to "very likely to use method."

Personality Characteristics. The needs for achievement and power were measured using the Manifest Needs Questionnaire developed by Steers and Braunstein (1976). This instrument utilizes behaviorally anchored

preferences in the work situation to measure need strengths. Each need is measured by five items. Information on the reliability and convergent and discriminant validity of the scales can be found in Steers and Braunstein (1976).

Actual Power. Respondents were asked to provide a rating of the overall influence of each principal in their school district. Ratings were made on a 9 point scale ranging from "almost no influence" to "very high influence." The measure of actual power was calculated by averaging the peer ratings for each principal.

Demographic Characteristics. Principals provided information on their age, sex, tenure in the district and tenure as a principal. Tenure on the job of principal (i.e., years of supervisory experience) was the only measure examined in this study.

Data Collection

Questionnaires were distributed to the principals and returned by mail. Due to the potentially sensitive nature of influence-rated behavior in organizations, emphasis was placed on the extreme confidentiality of results in explaining the study to principals. The response rate across the three districts was 83%.

Results

Two analyses were performed on the data. First, to examine predictions from the model of influence behavior suggested by Tedeschi et al. (1972), self-confidence (i.e., the perceived probability of success) in each decision situation was related to the rating of actual power and the needs for achievement and power. If actual power and the two need strengths affect influence behavior through the individual's

level of self-confidence, significant positive relationships should be found. The second analysis involved examining the direct relationships between each of the measures and the likelihood of using the five methods of influence in each decision situation.

Need Strengths, Actual Power and Self-Confidence

The self-confidence measure associated with each of the three decision situations was correlated with the measures of actual power, need for achievement and need for power. Of the nine relationships examined, only the correlation between the rating of actual power and the perceived probability of successful influence in the special projects decision situation was significant ($r = .39$, $p < .01$). Consequently, very little support was found for the proposed relationships between leader self-confidence and actual power and the needs for achievement and power. Possible reasons for these results will be discussed later.

Methods of Influence

The measures of need for power and achievement, actual power, years of supervisory experience and self-confidence were correlated with the likelihood ratings for the five methods of influence in each decision situation. Since the propensity of an individual to use certain methods of influence across relatively similar decision situations is likely to be stable, the correlations across each decision cannot be viewed as independent tests of relationships. Examining the correlations across decisions, however, provides some information concerning the stability of relationships.

The results of the analysis are presented in Table 1. As the results

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Insert Table 1 About Here
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indicate, several stable relationships were found. The needs for

achievement and power were found to be positively and significantly re-

lated to the likelihood of using persuasive arguments in each decision

situation. In addition, the need for power was found to be positively

related to the use of manipulation in two of the three decision situations

and negatively related to the use of appeals to legitimate authority in

the special projects decision. Years of supervisory experience was

positively related to the use of appeals to legitimate authority in each

decision situation. Year of supervisory experience was also found to be

negatively related to the use of manipulation in the budget, reclassification

and special projects decisions. No stable or consistent relationships

were found between the methods of influence and the rating of actual

power or the measures of self-confidence.

Discussion

The results of this study show direct relationships between the

likelihood of using various methods of influence and the principal's

need for achievement, need for power and years of supervisory experience.

As predicted, the needs for achievement and power were positively and

consistently related to the likelihood of using persuasive arguments.

In addition, less consistent relationships were found between these

needs and the use of manipulation. The need for power was significantly

related to manipulation in two of the three decision situations. In the

special projects decision, the relationship between manipulation and the

need for power approached significance ($r = .19$, $p < .10$). Evidently,

individuals with a high need for power have a greater willingness to

engage in what might be viewed as more Machiavellian or power-related tactics. Among the same group of principals, Mowday (Note 1) found the willingness to use manipulation related to independent ratings of overall influence effectiveness.

Also as predicted, years of supervisory experience were positively related to the use of appeals to legitimate authority in each of the three decision situations. This finding is consistent with the belief that individuals with long experience in a group or organization are more likely to rely upon their experienced-based expertise in exercising influence (Tedeschi et al., 1972). High tenure principals are more likely to have a complete knowledge of the school district's policies and regulations and relying upon this expertise may be the potentially most effective method of influencing decisions. Although not predicted, years of supervisory experience was also found to be negatively related to the use of manipulation across the decision situations. It is possible that principals with high tenure view manipulation as a po-tentially costly strategy and are not willing to take the risks in-volved in its use. In addition, there was a slight tendency for high tenure principals to have lower needs for power ($r = -.17$, $p < .10$). The results of this study suggest there is a direct positive relationship between the need for power and the use of manipulation.

The failure to find consistent relationships between the methods of influence and the measures of actual power and self-confidence is inconsistent with both predictions and previous research. Situational factors surrounding the decision situations studied, however, may ex-plain these negative findings. Most previous research has examined downward influence between superiors and subordinates. In such

situations, the influence agent is at a relative power advantage. The decisions studied here, however, involved the exercise of influence upward in the organization. Thus, the principals described their perceptions and potential influence behavior in a situation in which they were at a relative power disadvantage. This may have had the effect of limiting the importance of the principal's actual power as judged by peers. In the decision situations studied it is highly improbable that a principal would have greater power than the person they were trying to influence (e.g., district superintendent). Focusing on upward influence situations may have also attenuated the measures of perceived probability of successful influence. The means for these measures generally fell below the midpoint of the 11 point scale. In general, then, principals may have perceived a relatively low probability of successfully influencing these decisions. The limited financial resources available in the districts at the time of the study may have also affected these perceptions.

Problems with the perceived probability of success measure may account for the failure to find the predicted relationships between self-confidence and the actual power and need strength measures. As a consequence, these results cannot be interpreted as a failure to support the influence behavior model of Tedeschi et al. (1972). More research is clearly needed on the process through which power is exercised in organizations. Mowday (Note 1) found support for an expectancy theory or subjective expected utility approach to power motivation. Additional research is needed to extend the predictions of such models into other areas (e.g., the choice of a influence target and methods of influence). Rather than focus on overall self-confidence

in future research on methods of influence, it may be useful to investigate how the perceived effectiveness of a particular method affects the choice among alternative methods (cf., Raven & Kruglanski, 1970). In a exploratory investigation, the principals in this study were asked to rate the importance of several criteria that might be used in selecting a method of influence. The criteria considered most important was the perceived effectiveness of the method. It is apparent, however, that factors other than perceived effectiveness must also be taken into account. For example, organizational norms may exist governing the legitimacy of using various methods of influence. Such norms may require the use of a method considered to be less effective (Rosenberg & Pearlin, 1962). Research of this type is needed to increase our understanding of the process through which individuals translate power into effective influence in organizational decision situations.

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Footnotes

Table 1

Correlations Between Methods of Influence

and Characteristics of the Person Exerting Influence

Across Decision Situations

	Budget Decision					Reclassification Decision					Special Projects Decision				
	Threat	Legitimate Authority	Persuasive Arguments	Rewards	Manipulation	Threat	Legitimate Authority	Persuasive Arguments	Rewards	Manipulation	Threats	Legitimate Authority	Persuasive Arguments	Rewards	Manipulation
Need for Achievement	.00	.04	.41**	.06	.26*	-.14	-.08	.30**	.10	.16	-.02	-.11	.42**	.01	.12
Need for Power	.00	-.17	.25*	.09	.32**	.04	-.18	.24*	.15	.23*	.02	-.28*	.22*	.13	.19
Years of Supervisory Experience	.00	.26*	-.14	-.18	-.34**	.01	.28*	-.05	-.11	-.21*	-.17	.29**	-.12	-.17	-.22*
Overall Power	.00	.07	.11	.04	-.01	-.14	.09	.15	.03	-.09	-.19	-.01	.22*	.13	.19
Self-Confidence[a]	.00	.07	.12	-.02	.11	-.14	-.02	-.07	.30**	.17	.18	-.06	-.08	.12	.01

a measured as the perceived probability of successfully influencing each decision

* $p < .05$

** $p < .01$